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1. **Introduction**

Sartre’s play *No Exit* reflects his existentialist philosophy because it depicts social relations in a negative light and reveals that our being is only realized due to the presence of other people. In this essay, I will provide relevant background information to Sartre’s philosophy, write about in what ways Sartre’s play *No Exit* represents his philosophy as it applies to each of the three characters, and then conclude the essay.

1. **Contextual Background**

The Look is when one is in the Other’s presence, and because of the Other, is perceived in an unpredictable manner by the Other “as if I were to my self the truth of myself and as if the Other possessed only a deformed image of me” (Guignon, 2001, p. 335). Using Sartre’s example of peeking through the keyhole, the Other will see you crouching by the keyhole and label you however they please. The Other may label you as a creep, but you may very well be crouching by your own door. The Other believes you are a pervert, but you are simply seeing if anyone is home so you may be let in since you forgot your key at work. You might try to explain yourself, but because the Other is free to think what they please, they may believe you to be a liar as well as a pervert. One’s Ego, one’s being, is founded by the Other, “not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness but in that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other” (Guignon, 2001, p. 350). This means that because the Other sees you, you become a static being: a Being-for-Others.

Bad faith is when one “is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth. […] Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith is from myself that I am hiding the truth” (Guignon, 2001, p. 330). Bad faith is commonly confused with lying, but to lie, one must be knowledgeable of the truth and make the negation with one’s words to others. To be in bad faith is to consciously negate the truth, lying to oneself as opposed to others. According to Sartre, bad faith is when “consciousness instead of directing its negation outward turns it toward itself” (Guignon, 2001, p. 329).

1. **Argument**

In Sartre’s play, the three characters settle into their shared chamber and begin to try to figure out where the torturer is. All of them were under the misconception that the torture was to be a form of physical torture. As they introduce themselves to each other, they will later discover that they are each other’s torturers. The torture depicted in this hell is not that of a physical form, but that of the social relations of one person with the other two. In Sartre’s philosophy, he explains how we are not conscious of our being until an Other appears and we are in the Other’s presence. Our being is realized as whatever the Other labels us as. In *No Exit*, each of the three people reveal what they want from the others and realize that they are unable to ever get what they want, even just sitting in complete silence.

Garcin was a journalist who died for what he believed in, and he was in hell because he was an unfaithful husband. Throughout the play, he battles with Estelle’s attraction towards him and Gomez’s (a coworker on Earth) and Inez’s opinion of how he died. Near the end of the play, Garcin manages to open the door to leave the room. He refuses to leave because of one thing: Inez thinks he is a coward. They close the door and Garcin and Inez begin to argue about why she thinks he was not heroic in his death. Because of Inez’s Look, Garcin feels shame and is fully aware of his cowardice. If she was not there, he would not have had this label or had thought that he was cowardly. Garcin is in bad faith because he is quite literally denying himself freedom because he is perceiving himself as an object. This object he sees himself as is a coward, and he perceives himself in this fashion because Inez spoke freely of her thoughts about him.

Inez is the second person to enter the room and is in hell because she was potentially having an affair with her cousin’s wife, Florence. As the play goes on, Inez thinks lowly of Garcin’s actions in dying and constantly attempts to win Estelle’s heart. Because she voices that she believes Garcin to be a coward, Garcin does not leave the room at the end. In Inez’s attempts to win Estelle, Estelle always picks Garcin over her. The first attempt to seduce Estelle almost worked, except for that the presence of Garcin distracted Estelle and made her worry about what Garcin would think about them. This is an example of the Look, how just the mere presence of others makes one perceive their world as the Other’s world. Inez is in bad faith, such that she is lying to herself about Estelle not wanting her, even though Estelle told Inez directly that she doesn’t want her company. Inez refuses to believe that Estelle could not want her, and continues to attempt to win her heart even as Estelle is on top of Garcin.

Estelle is a young woman who was orphaned, but then married a rich older man in order to provide for her family. She is in hell because she had an affair with a younger man, Roger, and killed the baby that they had together. She will suffer not being successfully loved by Garcin and constantly being pursued lustfully by Inez throughout the play. Estelle is an example of a Being for Others, only worried about her appearance in the eyes of others. This is the motivation behind wanting a sufficient looking glass, believing that her lipstick was smudged. Estelle wants to make sure that she looks good for Garcin, whose Look makes her perceive the world as he sees it. Because she is a Being-for-Others, she is also worried about what Garcin thinks of her as she begins to lean into a kiss with Inez.

1. **Conclusion**

In writing this essay, it has become clear that Sartre’s *No Exit* is indeed accurate to his philosophy. Hell is other people because we are only made into being by the presence of other people, and this being that we are, is not decided by ourselves but by the Other. Each of them are perceived in each other’s worlds as not what they want to be seen as, so they are in suffering that the other two will always have the wrong image of them. In the play, each person is tortured by the social relationship which they have with the other two people in the room.

Reference List

Guignon, C., & Pereboom, D. (2001). *Existentialism: Basic Writings, Second Edition*.

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